

VZCZCXRO3322  
PP RUEHDBU  
DE RUEHMO #1501 1591551  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 081551Z JUN 09  
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3707  
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHHD/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 001501

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/08/2019  
TAGS: PREL PGOV KDEM PHUM PINR RS  
SUBJECT: MURDER OF TOP COP SHOWS THAT DAGESTAN IS STILL DANGEROUS

Classified By: Acting Political Minister Counselor David Kostelancik; reason 1.4 (d)

¶1. (SBU) The June 5 shooting of Dagestan's Interior Minister Adilgirei Magomedtagirov by a sniper while he stood outside a banquet hall where he was attending the wedding of a lower-ranking ministry official shows just how uncontrolled the security situation is in this North Caucasus republic. Pundits have been quick to come up with various versions of who killed Magomedtagirov, but it will be difficult to learn the truth in a region where most killings remain unsolved. Russian Federation President Dmitriy Medvedev interrupted his visit to St. Petersburg to attend an economic forum to order a high-ranking delegation to Dagestan to investigate the murder. A bigger challenge for Medvedev will be whether to replace Dagestan President Mukhu Aliyev before the latter fills out his term in 2010. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) In the latest in a series of murders of highly placed figures in the northern Caucasus republic of Dagestan, Interior Minister Adilgirei Magomedtagirov died on June 5 from a sniper's bullet to his heart while he stood outside a luxury banquet hall in the capital of Makhachkala. Magomedtagirov was attending the wedding of the daughter of a subordinate. The snipers also killed Abdurazak Abakarov, the head of the Dagestan Interior Ministry's administrative department and wounded several others. On May 21, unknown assailants killed Seifutdin Kaziakhmedov, the deputy head of the Investigative Committee of Dagestan's Interior Ministry and on May 25, Akhmed Tagayev, the deputy mufti of Dagestan died from gunshot wounds suffered in a Makhachkala suburb. Gadzhi Makhachev, Dagestan's Permanent Representative in Moscow, told us June 2 that the murder of Tagayev was especially tragic because he had been a popular cleric. According to the Caucasian Knot internet-based news outlet, Tagayev, who Makhachev said was trained as a medical doctor, spoke out against alcoholism and other social ills plaguing the republic.

¶3. (SBU) Commentators were quick to come up with multiple reasons for Magomedtagirov's murder. Aleksey Makarkin, general director of the reputable Center for Political Technologies, wrote on the polit.ru website that the basis for the murder could be either of the two main reasons for all violence in the North Caucasus -- interclan competition for power or religious extremism. He expanded this on the Center's own website, writing that Magomedtagirov could have been murdered by Dagestan's home-grown "wahhabist" religious extremists, by a conflict within the ministry itself, due to tensions within Dagestan over the upcoming February 2010 selection of a new president for the republic. On June 8 the daily Kommersant picked up on this last variant, although it noted that Magomedtagirov had made many enemies within the conservative religious community there for his fight against extremism and radical Islamists. The type of rifle and armor-piercing ammunition used in the attack gave some credence to the shooting resulting from an internal struggle for power within the interior ministry itself.

¶4. (SBU) Dagestan's president, Mukhu Aliyev, quickly washed his hands of any culpability in the matter. Aliyev, who regularly blames outside forces for Dagestan's internal mess, cast dispersions on "dishonest members of law enforcement agencies" who lured Magomedtagirov to the wedding reception. On June 6 he stated that Magomedtagirov's murder was not a sufficient basis for staging a counter-terrorism operation in Dagestan. If such a regime were installed, Dagestan government would lose control of its lucrative customs operations. Russian president Medvedev sent Federal Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliyev and federal Prosecutor General Yuriy Chaika to take the investigation of Magomedtagirov's murder under their personal control and dispatched the head of the federal Investigative Committee Aleksandr Bastrykin to Makhachkala.

Comment

-----  
¶5. (C) Magomedtagirov's murder is further proof, if any was needed, that Dagestan has replaced Chechnya and Ingushetiya as the most dangerous place in Russia's volatile North Caucasus. Kommersant journalist Musa Muradov told us June 4 that Aliyev is Medvedev's "weakest link" in the region, but that he did not think he would be replaced before his term expires in 2010. If this level of violence continues, Medvedev nonetheless will face the choice of whether to act quickly to install another leader for the troubled republic or risk further instability that could spread from the North Caucasus' largest and most populous republic to the rest.

BEYRLE